



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
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SORTING FOR LARGER FISH NOW ILLEGAL IN IOWA

DES MOINES – Anglers fishing Iowa waters are no longer allowed to sort through their catch to release smaller fish when a larger fish is caught. The practice, called culling, is now illegal, except for permitted bass fishing tournaments. This is a law new in 2005.

“Fish that have been held for a period of time on a stringer, in a fish basket, bucket or even many live wells do not all survive after being released back into the water,” said Marion Conover, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources fisheries bureau. “By not allowing this practice, we hope to reduce fish mortality.”

The new law says that any fish taking into possession by holding in a live well, on a stringer, or in other fish holding devices is part of the daily bag limit.

Fish may be released from possession so long as they are not replaced.

“For example, in my estimation, eight panfish makes a nice meal. If I catch and keep two bluegills, but can’t catch anymore, it is okay for me to release these fish rather than to clean only two. But it is illegal for me to sort and replace fish in order to upgrade the size of the fish in my possession,” he said.

The law also says that once the daily bag limit of a particular species is reached, fishing for that species can continue, as long as all the fish of that species caught are immediately released.

Anglers can pick up a copy of the 2005 Iowa Fishing Regulations booklet highlighting the new regulations, the fishing seasons and other information at Iowa DNR offices and wherever licenses are sold.

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THE FALL AND RISE OF THE BALD EAGLE

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

There's no mistaking them. The size, the wingstroke; the treetop perch over a stream or farm field. Of course, the snow-white head and tail are dead giveaways. Bald eagles are back...and in record numbers.

Nearly extinct in the continental U.S. a few decades ago, our nation's symbol is now a frequent flyer throughout much of Iowa each winter. A dozen communities celebrate with midwinter programs, attracting visitors from around the Midwest. Conservationists celebrate a success story. Winter anglers, hunters, skiers and others outdoors often get an up close look—and listen—as eagles fly low overhead, their wingbeats just audible in the cold air.

Eagle-watchers are tallying results from this month's Midwest survey of bald eagles. Wildlife diversity biologist Bruce Ehresman, from the Department of Natural Resources expects Iowa's tally to match or exceed last year's record of more than 4,400. "We typically have about 2,000 in Iowa over the last few years," says Ehresman. "But they have been going up dramatically."

Part of the climb is the weather. Eagles, and other migratory birds, push only as far south as they have to in the winter. Mild weather keeps them closer to home. A quick cold snap then, like we've had since the first of the year then concentrates them around areas of open water. Fish are their primary food, but our nation's symbol is not above making a meal out of dead pigs hauled out to the fields in manure spreaders or other landlocked delicacies.

Each year, the numbers edge upwards. "I saw 234 eagles on my count; from Coralville down to the Tri-County area on the Iowa River. That's the most ever for that route," reports DNR wildlife biologist Tim Thompson. Conservationists tackle their routes over a predetermined several day window, to get the most accurate 'snapshot' of eagle activity across the Midwest.

The Iowa River, at Coralville, is a good spot for watching eagle activity in this area; especially if the weather is extra cold and other water sources are frozen over. With two major rivers nearby, though, a few are usually visible throughout the area if you keep

your eyes to the skies. For maximum eagle watching, though, your best bet is at a lock and dam along the Mississippi River. Bellevue and Guttenberg are prime locations; probably due to thick cottonwood trees across the river from the towns. I've seen dozens, sometimes 100 or more perched in the big trees, swooping over the open water to snatch a fish or loafing on the ice between meals.

But counts in the thousands? Ehresman certainly didn't expect that 20 years ago. "Absolutely not," he admits. "In the 80s we were excited about it going from 383 (1983) to 700 (1988). We certainly didn't anticipate the rate of increase. The number of eagles seems to be going up about eight percent a year."

Perhaps most gratifying, is the number of juvenile eagles in the mix. A couple decades ago, it was uncommon to see more than a couple of the mottled dark-white mix birds. That still reached back to the 'pesticide years,' when DDT built up in the systems of mature eagles, causing paper-thin eggshells. Consequently, very few young eagles ever hatched. Now, about one-third of the eagles you see will be sub-adults. They attain full plumage and reach breeding age at age four or five.

Most of the winter eagles you see are migrants, but that phenomenon spills over into nesting season, too. "We know of 175 active bald eagle nests in Iowa (in 2004). We are gaining 15 or 20 each year," applauds Ehresman. "That means 150 to 175 young eagles are fledging each year. That should continue the increase." Nests have been reported in 69 Iowa counties; great news since the very first one was documented, in the late 1970s.

As numbers grow, people still want to see them. Ehresman advises keeping a good distance; 200-300 yards or more, to avoid pushing the eagles off their roosts or perches and expending extra energy in the cold winter. Spotting scopes are the best way to get up close. He also suggests remaining in a vehicle, where the human intrusion isn't quite as noticeable.

Bald Eagle Days

Various communities in Iowa, mainly along the Mississippi River, host Bald Eagle Days. They often include eagle viewing, with spotting scopes, programs with live birds, interpretative sessions and other activities. Some of the dates include:

January 22	LeClaire
January 30	Quincy
February 18-19	Red Rock (Pella) 641-828-7522
February 27	Saylorville (central Iowa) 515-276-4656

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GET READY FOR SPRING PLANTING

The latest arctic blast and twelve inches of snow might not get people to think about spring planting, but now is really an excellent time to get ready when warmer weather finally arrives.

Duane Bedford, state forester with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at Chariton, said people should think about what they want to accomplish with their planting site and to select species suitable to the area. “Waiting until April or May to order your plants may leave you shorthanded because some of the plants you need will probably be sold out.

“When selecting your plant species and the source for your plants, remember that it is important to purchase tree and shrub seedlings grown from Iowa seed sources,” he said. “Local Iowa seed sources survive and grow better than seeds collected in other states.”

The State Forest Nursery in Ames sells Iowa-grown conservation tree and shrub seedlings each year to Iowa landowners. There are 23 species of hardwood trees, 7 species of evergreens and 15 species available. The prices range from \$0.25 to \$0.45 per plant. There are also available 4 different packets of trees and shrubs prepared especially for turkey, pheasant and quail, songbirds, and general wildlife that sell from \$20 to \$90 per packet. Bedford advises interested landowners to contact the State Forest Nursery at 1-800-865-2477 or order on line at www.iowadnr.com/forestry/.

If planting 10, 5, or even just 2 acres sounds like a tremendous undertaking, consider a tree planter pulled by a tractor, which can plant 300 to 600 trees and shrubs per hour. “Many county conservation boards have planters which are rented out to county residents. If you don’t wish to do the planting yourself, a number of individuals and small firms do contract tree planting,” Bedford said. Go to www.iowatreeplanting.com for more information.

District foresters can offer advice on where to plant and what to plant and may help get landowners cost-share assistance for tree plantings through local Farm Service Agency’s riparian buffer strip program and bottomland hardwood program. Additional cost-share funds are available through Soil and Water Conservation District office from the Resource Enhancement and Protection program (REAP). Also, the state and local chapters of the National Wild Turkey Federation and Pheasants Forever often provide some cost-share support for conservation plantings for turkey habitat or pheasant habitat.

For advice on tree and shrub planting including cost-share programs, species selection, site preparation, and plantation maintenance, as well as advice on woodland management, get the name of your local DNR District Forester at www.iowadnr.com/forestry/.

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[Hold until Jan. 20]

WILDLIFE VS. THE COLD

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

The snow is one thing. The ice is another. Together, they're making it difficult for wildlife, even as subzero temperatures ease up...for awhile. Anything that has to peck, paw or pry through to food sources below is feeling the effects of ice under, and in some cases, on top of the foot of snow that socked Iowa in early January.

Some can survive extended periods. The basic rule of survival; the smaller the critter, the more it has to work to replace calories it burns to stay warm. Songbirds, for instance, are doubling up at the backyard feeders and in stands of weeds and other plants that hold high-value seeds up out of the icy layer. "Food is really important for resident wildlife," emphasizes Tim Thompson, wildlife biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. "That's why you see songbirds coming to feeders two or three times a day. They need to eat to fuel their fast-burning metabolism."

Quail, already at the northern edge of their range in Iowa, face hardship, too, across the current landscape. They can usually hold out for a week or so without food. A couple days after the snow fell, I flushed a covey of bobwhites in a long-abandoned and overgrown railroad bed. Most of them didn't fly more than 30 yards. There wasn't any cover, except for the narrow strip of overgrown trees and brush.

That makes those islands of safe cover even more attractive. As we walked into his shelterbelt of 20-foot cedars and smaller brush species a few days ago, Thompson and I didn't have to shout to be heard above the wind. "It really cuts down on the wind blowing through. You can see where the rabbits have really been down in this thick cover," he said, pointing out how the snow was packed down with telltale cottontail tracks. "We get a lot of birds roosting in the trees, too, when the snow is so deep. Otherwise, many of them prefer the grassy cover."

His backyard shelterbelt lies a few steps from an abandoned farmstead, several grassy waterways and some CRP acres, on a hillside west of Iowa City. The northwest wind blasted us again on the short walk to the farm buildings. "We should see a few pheasants as we get around the sunny side of the barn," he predicted. On cue, two roosters flushed from grassy clumps near the windbreak provided by the sagging structure. That prompted five or six more pheasants, hens mostly, to vacate their shelter for the far side of the hill. "Even with all the snow, there are still places for birds to get down in here," he demonstrated, brushing drifted snow from the bunched brome below. "This is going to provide a lot more warmth than sitting in the pine trees or brush; especially when the sun is out. They soak up the warm sunshine and that overhead cover still protects them from predators."

Now, though, in the third week of this ice and snow blanket, wildlife is moving farther from cover to feed. Maybe you've seen the flocks of turkeys over the last few days, pecking through the icy crust for waste grain in the fields. Deer, often seen at dusk and dawn, are hoofing down to those dropped kernels in the middle of the day. Their size gives them an advantage. They can build more of a fat reserve in the fall. They also range farther afield to get the nutrition they need.

Smaller game critters; like pheasants, have a tougher go of it. Most biologists say they can survive for up to three weeks with little or no food. But they still search for it. That leaves them exposed longer to predators. Those coyotes, owls, hawks and an occasional fox have had a tough time, too, since the storm. So have wandering cats, but those feral felines or the go-home-in-the morning 'house pets'...*and* their owners...deserve a special column themselves. Anyway, the increased need-to-feed by predators and prey alike mean fewer of them will make it to spring. How many don't make it depends on the weather. And the available cover.

As the saying goes, there's nothing you can do about the weather. But this isn't a bad time to underscore the advantage of food plots and other human created (or *returned*) wildlife cover. Well meant, but isolated attempts to provide grain in open areas just pulls those target species into the predator's bull's eye. A better alternative is to provide food plots, sorghum, for instance, or leaving a few edgerows of corn, near existing cover ahead of winter's worst. Better yet, providing that cover through CRP-type programs or other wild plantings reduces their chances of ending up Coyote Delight on tonight's menu.

And whether you watch them, hunt them or just know they are out there, better habitat increases their comfort margin...their *survival* margin...through the Iowa icecap.

Geese Gone

Seen any geese lately? On a Cedar River backwater last week, I counted over 300 geese and a couple dozen mallard ducks, tucked back out of the wind, with open water beneath them or a few webbed steps away. With our open early winter, they had no reason to migrate any farther south. Now, with the last blast of subzero cold on top of the snow and ice, most have flown the coop.

"The limiting factor for migratory birds is going to be snowfall," points out DNR wildlife biologist Tim Thompson. "If snow covers all the waste grain and they have to fly such a long distance to feed that they are 'losing energy' overall, they will migrate farther south." Thompson says an Iowa State University study showed that snow geese would fly 75 miles to feed, and still return to their home base in the evening if there was open water. When will they return? As soon as the 'snow line' recedes and water opens again.

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FREE CAMPING WEEKEND MAY 13 – 15

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has set May 13, 14 and 15 for free camping weekend in Iowa State Parks. Free camping weekend is open to Iowa residents only. Campers are required to fill out a camping slip just like normal, but in the amount paid box write free. Nonresidents are allowed to camp, but must pay the appropriate fee.

As in previous years, many state parks are planning events and programs.

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2005 HUNTING, FISHING LICENSES NEEDED

DES MOINES – Hunters and anglers are reminded to purchase their 2005 licenses. The 2004 licenses expired Jan. 10.

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IOWA FISHING REPORT

For the week of January 18, 2005

www.iowadnr.com

Ice fishing reports will be released every other week while quality ice conditions exist for the remainder of the ice fishing season.

Northwest

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): Walleye fishing is fair early in the morning and late in the evening. Some nice fish are being caught off the north end, Buffalo Run and Big Stony Point using jigging raps and kastmasters tipped with minnows or minnow heads. Yellow perch fishing is slow, but there is some activity on the north end and Buffalo Run. A few crappies and bluegills are being caught at the North Grade using wax worms and teardrops.

West Lake Okoboji (Dickinson): Yellow perch are being caught in Emerson Bay and Miller's Bay. The walleye bite has been fair in Smith's Bay and Triboji late in the evening. A few bluegills are being caught in Emerson, Smith's and north end using wax worms and teardrops.

Silver Lake (Dickinson): Walleye fishing has been excellent around the south boat ramp late at night.

Center Lake (Dickinson): A few walleye are being caught around the north boat ramp.

Lake Pahoja (Lyon): Anglers are catching lots of small bluegill and crappie around the **brush piles**.

Black Hawk Lake (Sac): Yellow bass and crappie fishing is fair using live minnows and jigging spoons tipped with minnow heads.

Arrowhead Lake (Sac): Fishing is fair around structure for 7 to 8-inch bluegills.

Yellow Smoke (Crawford): Fishing is good for 8 to 9-inch bluegills on teardrops and wax worms. The lake is drawn down 8 feet.

Brushy Creek (Webster): A few walleyes have been hitting on minnows. A few bluegills have been caught on wax worms. The lake is completely covered by snow. The ice thickness on the main lake remains unsafe.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Ice thickness is 12 to 18 inches over most of the lake. Walleye fishing is good. Jigging spoons and minnows are both producing fish. Sunrise or sunset is the best times for success. Remember the 14-inch minimum length limit. Yellow bass are being caught northeast of the Island, Farmer's Beach and Billy's Reef. Small spoons and minnows are producing the best. White bass are being caught in the same areas as the yellow bass.

Indian Lake, Eldred Sherwood Park (Hancock): Bluegills are biting on small jigs tipped with wax worms.

Upper Pine Lake (Hardin): Bluegill fishing is good using wax worms and small jigs.

Smith Lake (Kossuth): Bluegills are hitting on small jigs and wax worms. Sorting is required, but fish in the 6 to 8-inch range are available.

Lake Catherine (Winnebago): Bluegills are being caught on small jigs and wax worms. Fish are running 6 to 8 inches. Late afternoon provides the best action.

Silver Lake (Worth): Yellow perch fishing is good around the jetty and the campground using minnows. Sorting is required, but 7 to 9-inch fish are available.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

Southwest

Don Williams (Boone): Bluegill and crappie fishing is fair to good around cedar trees south of the ramp in the main lake. Jigs and wax worms are being used for bluegill and jigs and minnows are preferred for crappie.

Big Creek (Polk): Bluegill fishing is fair during the day using tear-drops and wax worms in the Lost Lake area near the spillway. Crappie fishing has been good late in the day and at night using jigs and wax worms/minnows. Walleye fishing has picked up, primarily at night in 35 to 40 feet of water using minnows.

Lake Ahquabi (Warren): Bluegill and redear fishing has been fair to good using jigs or hooks with worms and wax worms.

Hooper Lake (Warren): Bluegill fishing has been fair using wax worms and jigs.

Banner Lake (Warren): Trout fishing has been fair, and the final stocking for this winter is Jan. 18. Anglers are reminded to purchase their 2005 fishing license and trout fees.

Hickory Grove (Story): Bluegill fishing is fair using small jigs/hooks and wax worms. The better fishing areas have been around structure, trees and/or pallets.

Easter Lake (Polk): Bluegill fishing has been good with jigs and wax worms, although there are a number of smaller fish being caught. Crappie fishing has been good with jigs and minnows. Best areas have off the face of the dam.

Rock Creek (Jasper): Bluegill fishing has been fair using jigs and wax worms. Crappie fishing has been fair to good using jigs and minnows. Anglers have been scattered across most of the lake.

Mormon Trail (Adair): Good for bluegills of all sizes. Crappies are fair tipping jigs with a minnow.

Littlefield (Audubon): Bluegill and crappie fishing is fair on wax worms.

Nodaway (Adair): Bluegills are slow, but are averaging 7 to 8 inches in length. Crappies are fair using minnows late in the afternoon.

Orient (Adair): Crappies are good jigging minnows in 8 to 10 feet of water.

DeSoto (Harrison): Crappie fishing is good using minnows around structure late in the afternoon. Bluegills are being caught but most are small.

Willow (Harrison): Bluegills in the 7 to 8-inch range are being caught using wax worms. Crappies are slow but some are being caught using minnows in the evening.

Viking (Montgomery): Bluegill fishing is good using teardrops and wax worms around structure. Crappies are fair using minnows in early morning and late afternoon. Anglers are catching 5 to 7-inch yellow bass on jigs tipped with minnows.

Manawa (Pottawattamie): Bluegills are being caught, but most are small. Catfishing is fair in afternoon using dead minnows. Ice conditions vary from 2 to 8 inches. Check the ice thickness often and remain cautious.

Prairie Rose (Shelby): Small bluegills are being caught with jigs and tear drops tipped with wax worms. Crappie fishing is excellent for 7-inch fish around structure in 8 to 10 feet of water.

Southwest Iowa Farm Ponds: Farm ponds have been producing very well with anglers catching bluegill, and in the larger ponds, crappie, using teardrops tipped with wax worms. Ponds that have produced large bluegill historically are producing large numbers of fish. Ice conditions are more suitable with most ponds having 6 to 12 inches of ice and several inches of snow.

Three Mile (Union): Ice is good in most places but thin spots do remain in some areas. Bluegill and crappie can be caught in lower areas of the lake over the road beds and creek channel.

Fogle Lake (Ringgold): Ice is 5 to 11 inches thick in most areas. Bluegill 7 to 8 inches long can be caught in the lower portion of the lake along the creek channel and some crappies are getting caught along with the bluegill.

Little River (Decatur): Some crappie and bluegill can be caught in the creek channel midway up the lake. Ice is 5 to 7 inches in most areas. Thinner spots do exist.

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 – 19: Ice conditions are still variable and anglers should use caution. Bluegill and crappie are biting on teardrops with wax worms or minnows in Big Timber. You will need to sort for size of fish to keep. Bluegills in the Hidden Acres area are biting on teardrops.

Lake Odessa (Louisa): Crappies are biting on minnows along the trees in upper Sand Run and the stump fields in lower Sand Run. Anglers are also picking up a few bluegills on wax worms.

Lake Darling (Washington): Recent below zero weather finally increased ice thickness to useable levels, but it also kept away ice anglers.

Lake Geode (Henry): Ice conditions are variable. About 1,000 geese kept the area just north of the lower boat ramp was open water until late last week. Try around some of the deep brush piles and the creek channel as it passes the beach for some nice bluegills and crappies.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): Anglers are catching some nice bluegills in the morning in the area around the campground boat ramp.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Anglers are reporting 5 to 7 inches of ice in the coves. Crappies have been hitting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm and also on vertical jigged presentations.

Lake Miami (Monroe): Ice reported at 4 to 6 inches. Bluegills and crappies have started hitting on small jigs.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Ice is still extremely variable. Use caution if venturing out and test ice regularly.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Ice is reported at 5 to 6 inches. Very few anglers have been fishing due to the previous open water and unsafe ice. Use small jigs around cedar tree piles and around pallet structures.

Lake Macbride (Johnson): Anglers have reported slow fishing but some bluegills and a few crappies have been taken on small jigs tipped with wax worms. Deeper brush piles have been producing best.

Pleasant Creek (Linn): Some bluegills are being caught on small jigs tipped with wax worms. Best reports have been from deeper structure on the west side and off the dam.

Hannen Lake (Benton): Decent numbers of bluegills are being taken on jig/wax worm combos fishing out from the dam and out in front of the shop.

Kent Park (Johnson): Bluegill and crappie fishing has been moderate, with the occasional bass and catfish being caught as a bonus.

Diamond Lake (Poweshiek): Ice conditions have finally improved. Anglers are catching bluegills off the dam and crappies off the boat ramp.

Rodgers Lake (Benton): Bluegills are being caught on small jigs/wax worms. Hit the deeper brush piles for best results.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: Most backwaters on **Pools 9 to 11** have 12 or more inches of ice. Anglers still need to be cautious—especially near the shoreline or in areas where current may exist. Melting snow in these areas can weaken the ice. Cold weather kept a lot of anglers off the ice this past week, but anglers did report better fishing in Minnesota Slough and Cordwood Lake (**Pool 9**) and good catches of bluegill and a few nice crappies in Norwegian and Methodist lakes (**Pool 10**). The afternoon bite seems to be faster. Bussey Lake (**Pool 10**) has been slow, but there were some better

reports of bluegill fishing over the weekend. A few nice yellow perch are being caught in backwater areas on the Wisconsin side of the river above Prairie du Chien. Reports of tip-up fishing for northern pike have slowed over the past week. The boat ramp at the DNR's Guttenberg office (**Lock and Dam 10**) has been blocked with ice restricting access to tailwater fishing for walleye and sauger. Ice conditions in **Pool 12 to 15** have improved with last week's cold temperatures and fishing success is also up. There were no current fishing reports available for **Pool 12** (probably due to the cold temperatures and lack of anglers); however, Fish Trap, Tippy's Lake, Kehoe Lake, and No Name Lake are good places to try fishing. Brown's Lake (**Pool 13**) has been fair to good for bluegill and crappie. The Green Island bottoms (**Pool 13**) are good for bluegill and crappie, but you must have either an Iowa resident or non-resident fishing license to fish the Green Island complex. In Green Island, try fishing Sawmill and Fish lakes. Michelson Landing (**Pool 13**) has reported very good bluegill fishing, but many fish being caught are smaller in size. A few crappie and bluegill are being caught in Rock Creek (**Pool 14**)—again, the size of the fish is small.

Lake Hendricks (Howard): Bluegill fishing is excellent with fish in the 8 to 10-inch range. Fish during the morning hours near the point in 7 to 10 feet of water for best results. An occasional nice crappie is also being taken.

Lake Meyer (Winnesiek): Ice fishing has picked up with a good mix of bluegills and crappies being reported. The fish tend to be suspended in 8 to 12 feet of water.

Alice Wyth, Big Woods and Fisher lakes (Black Hawk): Crappie and bluegill fishing are fair during the early morning or late evening hours.

Farm Ponds (Delaware): Bluegill fishing is good in area farm ponds.

Heritage Pond (Dubuque) and **North Prairie Lake** (Black Hawk): Rainbow trout will be stocked Saturday, Jan. 22, weather permitting. Anglers are reminded to purchase their 2005 trout fees. Many of the trout streams are open and fishable throughout the winter months.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-926-3276.

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